Remembering Vietnam

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy made clear his determination to "draw a line in the sand" and to prevent a Communist victory in Vietnam. The territory of Vietnam was also a center of conflict in Southeast Asia as the developing nation had been fought over for a few decades by a multitude of nations. The Vietnam War carried on for nearly 15 years and under 4 different presidents, culminating in the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

As the 1960s were already a tumultuous time socially in the United States, the fact of young men being drafted to go to war added fuel to the fire. As early as 1964, there were many in the United States who protested American involvement in the war while many others stood in staunch support of it. Whether in favor or against, one fact was undeniable: the sheer loss of life. Estimates from the National Archives indicate that at least 58,220 soldiers were killed.

This November, we honor those who lost their lives during this war. While the nation was divided about the necessity of the conflict, there was universal sympathy and understanding for the plight of the soldiers involved. The items on display here are representative of how the Vietnam War impacted the Terre Haute community.

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*The above should go on an 8 x 10 stock card about the display case.

Index to exhibit items

1. *Aftermath: A Soldier's Return from Vietnam* is the story of Frederick Downs, Jr. of Kingman, Indiana who lost his left arm and had his body mutilated after stepping on a land mine on January 11, 1968. Library director, Ed Howard, had this book in his personal collection and considered it a source of inspiration.
2. Vietnam Veterans memorial at the Vigo County Courthouse. The plaque was donated by the VFW, Post 972 and dedicated May 27, 1996. The reverse side (not shown here) features the names of several POWs and MIAs from Terre Haute.
3. Quentin Beecher's sketch was completed by Michigan artist Shary Aument as a means of honoring him. Beecher was declared MIA on June 11, 1967. Beecher's father was Samuel Beecher Jr., a Terre Haute lawyer, and his grandfather, Samuel Beecher Sr. served as mayor of Terre Haute from 1935-1939.
4. During a visit to Terre Haute from presidential candidate George Wallace in 1968, a crowd gathered by the courthouse. Some of them carried protest signs, including one that read, "WE WERE RIGHT ABOUT VIETNAM."

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